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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: SLOVAKIA POLITICAL ROUNDUP AUGUST 24, 2004

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED -- PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

Religious Communities May Get Second Restitution Possibility

1. (U) The Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) has prepared a draft bill to return confiscated church property. Under its terms, churches and religious communities would be able to reclaim property that was confiscated or transferred to the state between May 8, 1945 and 1990. The Jewish community could reclaim property confiscated as early as November 1938 (when anti-Jewish legislation was introduced). The MOA draft bill essentially reopens a process that originally expired in 1994 and removes discrepancies that existed between registered religious communities and private persons in the past. Private citizens were granted an additional period for reclaiming land in 2001, while religious communities were not. The bill is under discussion in parliamentary committees.

General Prosecutor's Office Defends Decision to Free Majsky

2. (SBU) Katarina Leiferova, the Prosecutor General's chief of staff, told poloff her office is considering legislative changes to the Law for the Special Prosecutor's Office (which deals with organized crime and high-level corruption). The GP wants to increase cooperation between state witnesses and police investigators who work on the same cases.

3. (SBU) Leiferova defended Prosecutor General Dobroslav Trnka's controversial decision to release from pre-trial custody Jozef Majsky, the business tycoon charged with white collar crimes. She expressed confidence in Trnka's ability to make unpopular, albeit correct, legal decisions. She stated that time will tell that it was the right decision, and the GP's office did not appreciate politicians' unsupportive press statements (a reference to Justice Minister Daniel Lipsic's public criticism of the decision). There was no new evidence being collected against Majsky and no need to prolong his detention since Majsky's presence in court was not needed. Leiferova added that if he were unable to attend the trial due to illness, the case could go forward on the available information. (Note: Illness is not the issue, flight is. According to Slovak law, a case can be tried in absentia if the accused has been delivered the file, summoned, property interrogated, informed about his right to study the file, etc., and if the crime carries a maximum sentence of five years in prison. Majsky's alleged crimes may carry a higher sentence.)

New Social Fund Focuses on High Unemployment Areas

4. (U) A new "Social Fund" administered by the Ministry of Labor and financed mainly through the European Social Fund, will assist unemployed and socially disadvantaged Slovaks. The fund is now operating in the fifteen localities with the highest unemployment in the Banska Bystrica, Kosice, and Presov regions. The Social Fund will make large grants up to 70,000 Euro and micro-grants for 25,000 Euro, totaling 15 million Euro for 2004-2006. The basic structure is similar to many USAID grants, such as the four-year regional Roma Integration Program, in that it focuses on developing partnerships and projects from the bottom up.

5. (SBU) The fact that the Social Fund will not be dedicated exclusively to Roma projects has prompted some controversy. Lenka Vavrekova, Director of the Fund, told emboffs that the Roma Plenipotentiary and other activists have sought more control over the decision-making and argued that all grants should be geared towards Roma. The GOS countered that not only Roma suffer problems of unemployment and poverty.

THAYER

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